



# Working Together for Home Fire Safety

A Factsheet on Home Fire Prevention

**M**ore than 4,500 Americans die each year in fires and more than 30,000 are injured. An overwhelming number of fires occur in the home. There are time-tested ways to prevent and survive a fire. It's not a question of luck. It's a matter of planning ahead.

## EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONE SMOKE DETECTOR

Buy a smoke detector at any hardware or discount store. It's inexpensive protection for you and your family. Install a smoke detector on every level of your home. A working smoke detector can double your chances of survival. Check it monthly, keep it free of dust, and replace the battery at least once a year. Smoke detectors themselves should be replaced after ten years of service.

## PREVENT ELECTRICAL FIRES

Never overload circuits or extension cords. Do not place cords and wires under rugs, over nails or in high traffic areas. Immediately shut off and have professionally repaired, or replace appliances and lamps that sputter, spark or emit an unusual smell. Have an electrician check the wiring in your house.

## USE APPLIANCES WISELY

When using appliances follow the manufacturer's safety precautions. Overheating, unusual smells, shorts and sparks are all warning signs that appliances need to be shut off, then replaced or repaired. Unplug appliances when not in use. Use safety caps to cover all unused outlets, especially if there are small children in the home.

## ALTERNATE HEATERS

- Portable electric space heaters need their space. Keep anything combustible at least three feet away.
- Keep fire in the fireplace. Use fire screens and have your chimney cleaned annually. The creosote build-up can ignite your roof and the entire house.
- Kerosene heaters should only be used where approved by authorities. Never use gasoline or camp-stove fuel. Refuel outside and only after the heater has cooled.

## AFFORDABLE HOME FIRE SAFETY SPRINKLERS

When home fire sprinklers are used with working smoke detectors, your chances of surviving a fire are greatly increased. Sprinklers are affordable--they can increase property value and lower insurance rates.

New technology will allow sprinklers to be connected directly to your standard home plumbing system. Individual sprinkler heads are only activated where fire strikes. Consider a home sprinkler system whenever renovating, buying or building a house. Contact your local fire department for more information.

## PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

Practice an escape plan from every room in the house. Feel your way out with your eyes closed. Caution everyone to stay low to the ground when escaping from fire and never to open doors that are hot. Purchase an approved escape ladder to climb out of rooms above the first floor, and practice using it. Select a location where everyone can meet after escaping the house. Get everyone out quickly, and then call the fire department from a neighbor's home.

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## CARING FOR CHILDREN

Children under five are naturally curious about fire. Many play with matches and lighters. Tragically, these children set over 100,000 fires every year.

Take the mystery out of fire play by teaching your children that fire is a tool, not a toy. Practice fire safety in your home by following these tips:

- Keep matches and lighters in a safe place.
- Look for signs of fire play, such as burn holes in carpets, clothes or furniture, burnt matches in a closet or under the bed, or disappearing lighters or matches.
- Teach them not to hide from a fire but to get out and stay out.
- Have regular safety drills with your family. Practice escape plans.

## CARING FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Every year 1,000 senior citizens die in fires. Many of these fire deaths could have been prevented. Seniors are especially vulnerable because many live alone and can't respond quickly. Show your concern for an older person by reminding him or her to:

- Never smoke in bed. And when smoking anywhere else, put out cigars and cigarettes immediately if drowsy.
- Never leave lit cigars, cigarettes, or pipes unattended.
- Never wear dangling sleeves or loose garments when cooking.
- Turn off burners when leaving the kitchen. If cooking food must be left unattended, take a potholder or spoon as a reminder.

Finally, having a working smoke detector dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

For More Information Contact:  
The United States Fire Administration  
Office of Fire Management Programs  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Or visit the USFA website:  
[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)

